II

CULTURAL HEALING

Just think what could happen if the nightly news featured

as many stories about people who are committing acts of goodness

as those who are committing acts of violence.

What a powerful and transforming message we could give to our children!

The history of America is one of the most remarkable Stone Soup stories of all. In just three hundred years, people from all parts of the world have come to live together, forming the most culturally diverse country on the planet. We're here with our struggles and challenges, our talents and idiosyncrasies, as well as our hopes and dreams, the color, pattern, subject, and structure of our precious mosaic of nationalities, races, religions, and cultures. As a multicultural nation, while we have our own problems, we have an advantage in the world.

The victims of September 11 came from a cross-section of America, and of the world. They were black, white, Hispanic, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, rich, poor, and middle class—and that same diverse cross-section of people has helped with the relief efforts.

We're all in this together. It doesn't matter how much money you have, or what your religion is, or the color of your skin. Arab Americans in Ohio, Laotian Americans in Wisconsin, and Hispanic Americans in Iowa all feel a sense of pride when they say "I am an American." And in the days immediately after September 11, Cuban and Haitian refugees in Miami willingly worked overtime to keep up with the sudden demand for American flags.

After September 11, America's most famous Muslim, Muhammad Ali, pleaded for tolerance. And while hate crimes against Arab-looking people increased in some communities, so did acts of tolerance and solidarity. Proud of being the melting pot of the world, New Yorkers hung signs in their shop windows proclaiming "United We Stand," and "We Shall Overcome." In Toledo, Ohio, the non-Muslim community joined hands with Muslims to form a protective circle around the Islamic

Center's mosque.

The cultural heroes in this chapter show us that when we teach tolerance, learn forgiveness, and practice compassion, we can heal our collective wounds and move forward. When we bring people from different heritages together, we find ourselves on common ground, facing common problems. We can accept and even appreciate our differences, and we can rise above the distinctions that divide us. As individuals and as a people, we suffer injuries, but we can heal.

The Dalai Lama teaches tolerance, using the power of "truth, courage, and determination" to fight evil and, perhaps more important, to transform it. "If we wage war against our natural instinct for revenge, we will have done something very special," he says. "Then the world will recognize our stand against the endless cycle of violence—and there will be justice."

"We are one human race," Gandhi said. "Religion must unify us, not divide us." After a Hindi man he knew had lost his family in a horrific act of religious hatred, Gandhi asked him to set aside his anger and vengeance and learn how to forgive. "Go and find an orphan Muslim baby and nurture the baby as your own," he advised him. "You must allow the baby to grow up in its own faith." The stories in this chapter honor people from every culture. Amazing as their protagonists are, they are human— real-life heroes for you to identify with, setting real-life standards we can work to uphold. These are compelling stories of African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and European Americans who overcame obstacles, endured personal sacrifices, and courageously persevered to better the lives of

their people. They have dispelled negative stereotypes, worked for justice, and restored cultural pride. These are powerful lessons about how we can heal our culture, of our country and the world.

The Civil Rights Movement in America offers hundreds of stories of courage and cooperation. These heroes remind us of what it takes to stand up for what we believe in, in the face of injustice. They show us the power of committing ourselves to a noble goal: once we decide to work for justice, somehow we find the strength to make tough choices and hard sacrifices. They show us how to become heroes: by transforming obstacles—despair and hatred, oppression and resentment—into opportunities to do better. They teach us never to give up hope.

Cultural healing sometimes requires humility and honesty. Healing can be painful. Some of the stories in this chapter remind us that terrible mistakes have been made, often by well-intentioned people. Everyone likes to be right, and no one wants to admit he was wrong. Alabama governor George Wallace's ability to admit his mistakes, to apologize for his hateful words and deeds against the Civil Rights Movement and to try to make amends, took great courage. It also took courage for others to forgive him, to allow him to join the thirtieth anniversary commemoration of the march from Selma to Montgomery.

Other stories show how one person can turn the tide against racism. In Montana, one Christian mother began the healing process in her community by rallying her neighbors to stand together and stop the hate crimes against their Jewish neighbors. An African-American minister teaches tolerance—to be willing and able to accept others and their differences so "that all different colors of hands reach down to help each

other."

Some cultural healers broke free from the vicious cycle of poverty and then reached back to help others. Through their stories, we come to understand their struggles and celebrate their victories. It often takes tremendous courage, especially to realize that struggle and victory must start with ourselves. In the story about Edward James Olmos's work with young gangs in Los Angeles, George Sarabia says, "If I'm not able to forgive, when will it ever stop?"

Every culture has a long history and a rich tradition of helping others. In the Native American culture, children are taught to think about how their actions will affect the next seven generations. The African proverb "It takes a whole village to raise a child" reminds us that we are *all* responsible for raising *all* of our nation's children. The Jewish tradition of *tikkun olam* encourages people to carry out their responsibility of mending the world. In Puerto Rico, people say, "Nos *estamos moviendo nos para adelante."* ("By working together we can move forward.")

While not everyone can be a Martin Luther King Jr., a Gandhi or a Cesar Chavez, we can all learn from them and can help carry on their legacy. When we help one another, we bring out the best in ourselves and each other. Together, we can keep our promise to be "one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—
Let it be that great strong land of love . . .
Oh, let America be America again—
The land that never has been yet—

And yet must be....

LANGSTON HUGHES,
from *Let America Be America Again*

When you hear of stories about people from different cultures who are committing acts of goodness, spread the good news. Share these stories with your friends, your newspaper editor, your TV reporter. Challenge your friends and family to practice greater tolerance. Take small steps toward healing our country and the world.